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SOURCE Haksang Kwa Ch'ongyon.HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE KOREAN YOUTH MOVEMENT

Korea's March First Independence Movement of 1919 ended in failure, notwithstanding the fact that there were more than 10 million people mobilized in the movement. Historically analyzed, we find both direct and indirect causes for this failure.

The direct causes included (1) the modest and conciliatory policy of the bourgeoisie who led the movement, (2) the numerical weakness of the progressive parties, (3) the absence of basic demands which would spur the people to action and keep them united, and (4) the absence of imperative objectives related to daily living that would drive the masses to struggle incessantly and untiringly. In other words, the movement was initiated primarily for political reasons, and since it had little to do with matters such as land problems, it failed to appeal to the farmers. This was important, since the farmers constituted more than two-thirds of the Korean population.

In addition, there were such indirect factors as (1) Japan, a victorious nation, enjoyed the advantage of international relations at that time; (2) although launched in coordination with and under the support of the parallel movements abroad, the Korean movement received no material support from abroad.

Although a failure, the movement instilled in the Korean people a strong racial and class consciousness. Furthermore, during the period that followed, young Korean intellectuals began to be influenced by the Soviet socialism. After the March First Movement, numerous youth organizations sprang up all over Korea, and on 1 February 1920 the Federation of Korean Youth Associations was established, consisting of 133 organizations and over 30,000 members.

The purpose of the Federation of Korean Youth Associations was to promote, develop, and consolidate all youth organizations. This was to be accomplished by frequent meetings to coordinate activities and improve morale, by publications and propaganda, by sponsoring public addresses and technical schools, supporting public education for the youth, sponsoring athletic meets, granting industrial organizations, conducting industrial research, and by improving the living conditions of the poor.

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From 1921 onward some of these objectives were carried out vigorously. At first the Federation gave considerable support to the consumer cooperative movement. However, because of the lethargy of the bourgeois elements who ruled the Federation, the cooperative movement declined, and by 1922 enthusiasm for it had disappeared.

On 24 March 1923, the Seoul Youth Association, an organization affiliated with the Federation, sponsored a national youth convention at Seoul. Several hundred delegates participated representing over 100 organizations. Women's affairs, religion, education, labor, economics, racial, and social problems were discussed and the convention was scheduled to pass its resolutions on 29 March. However, 3 days after the opening, the convention was ordered to close by the Japanese police who feared a insurgent outbreak.

On 20 April 1924, the League of Korean Youth Associations held its inaugural convention in Seoul, with 176 delegates participating. Later, more than 220 organizations joined the League. The objectives of the League of Korean Youth Associations were (1) to establish a new society based on the welfare of the masses, and (2) to become the spearhead of the Korean liberation movement. Strong pressure from the Japanese police and the prohibition of Koreans from assembling, however, restricted the League's social reform activities.

During the same month, the Korean Workers League was organized.

The three central organizations: the Federation of Korean Youth Associations, the League of Korean Youth Associations, and the Korean Workers League, not only centralized all youth activities in Korea but also succeeded in uniting the farmers and workers who were effectively influenced by the organizations and began to take active part in their activities.

During this period there was another national organization, the New Youth League, separate from others. This organization, founded in August 1922, was first called Proletarian Youth Association, but was renamed the Saturday Club, in June 1923. The name was changed again, in February 1924, to the New Youth League. This organization was notoriously subversive. Its policies provided for (1) social reform through military training and the indoctrination of youths, and (2) that the League should be an exclusive organization of proletarian youths. The plans of the New Youth League to sponsor the Far East Youth Convention were interrupted by the Japanese authorities.

The establishment of the Korean Communist Youth Party, 18 April 1925, was an epochal event in the history of the Korean youth movement. After its first failure, the ultimate success of the Korean independence movement seemed to depend upon the Korean Communists. It became apparent that only the Communists, with their organizing ability, could bravely continue the struggle under the strong pressure and interference of the Japanese authorities. Moreover, unlike the other social reformers who concentrated on the political front and were more or less utopian dreamers, the Communists were guided by the economic front and offered practical solutions for the daily living problems of the suffering masses. The political blunders of the bourgeoisie who previously had led the movement to failure and their subsequent demoralization impressed the public unfavorably. As a result, the masses began to desert the bourgeoisie leaders and respond to the Communist appeal.

The year 1925 through 1927 marked the turning point in the history of the Korean independence movement. This period was characterized by the drastic change from a relatively mild movement nurtured by the more or less instinctive human desire for freedom, and as such limited to a few intellectuals and the bourgeoisie, to an aggressive movement strongly motivated by the new economic front that appealed to the hearts of the masses and encompassed the whole social strata with definite and precise objectives.

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This trend developed into the June Tenth Demonstration in 1926. The significant fact about this demonstration was that it was led by students, which indicated the new direction of the movement towards embracing all anti-Japanese elements -- students and workers, intellectuals and nonintellectuals.

The most notable accomplishment of the youth movement of this period was the unification of the various proletarian organizations which frequently lacked unity because of religious conflicts.

The famous Kwangju Student Incident which occurred in Kwangju Railway Station in November 1929 between Japanese Police and Korean students ushered in the period of continuous struggle by students which lasted until March 1930. During this period, 194 schools and over 54,000 students were suspended. In January 1930, when the movement was at its climax, 2,000 employees of the Pusan Spinning Company, 300 workers of the Kato Rice Refinery in Inchon, and the workers of the Taschang Textile Company in Seoul, launched a general sympathy strike.

After 1931 the movement reverted to underground activity because of the increased pressure of the government in and around Hamgyong Province. Students instigated farmers riots.

We conclude by saying that the anti-Japanese sentiment, which served effectively in unifying the youths for Communistic purposes, tended to alienate the public from the movement when it was turned to radical actions. The public shunned both patriotism and Communism, when too large a dose was given at once. The lack of public acceptance and support, so important in the perpetuation of an organization, forced most of the organizations to disintegrate.

The foregoing historical analysis of the Korean Youth Movement is based on the meager information available due to the circumstances prior to the liberation of Korea which did not permit the free recording of data. It is hoped that it will serve as a valuable lesson to the the North Korean Communist organizers of today.

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